

NSC BRIEFING

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

20 NOVEMBER 1956

& LEADERSHIP

POPULAR DISSATISFACTION IN THE SOVIET UNION

- I. Soviet public reaction to Polish and Hungarian developments indicates some unrest and dissatisfaction with the policies of the Soviet leadership.
 - A. Ambassador Bohlen, on basis informal survey, believes that events in Hungary have made "deep impression" on Soviet students and young intellectuals in Moscow and that a substantial portion condemns the Soviet intervention.
 - B. Moscow University students have been particularly bold in questioning the regime's policies.
 1. A French student there reports that students in the physics department held a meeting a fortnight ago, at which party representatives were excluded. A resolution was adopted, and placed on the University bulletin board, demanding the introduction of a second political party and freedom from political control for university discussion groups. The influence of Polish students enrolled in the physics department is reported as one reason for the unrest.
 2. Other samples of student opinion include expressions of sympathy for Hungary's revolt and Poland's challenge to Moscow's authority. One student stated that the Soviet Government had no right to condemn the attack on Egypt in view of its armed intervention in Hungary. According to another report, students posted BBC news stories about Hungary on Moscow University bulletin boards in defiance of officers.

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C. A UN Embassy observer at a recent lecture on international events at the Lenin Library in Moscow reports, that when the speaker solicited written questions from the predominantly student audience, all the questions proved to be about Hungary and Poland.

1. The speaker refused to discuss the questions, whereupon a young member of the audience demanded to "hear the truth" about Hungary.
2. When the speaker asked: "Does anyone in the audience believe that the Soviet press does not print the truth?" the entire audience rose as one man and soon thereafter left the hall.

II. Popular dissatisfaction with other Soviet policies has gone beyond the questioning stage to definite acts against the regime.

A. A three-day strike occurred recently in the huge ball-bearing plant in Moscow. Less serious demonstrations took place at other factories.

1. According to one report, the ball-bearing plant workers held a protest meeting against new work norms introduced by the plant director. The workers asked that Khrushchev come to the factory but returned to work when a lesser official arrived, fired the plant director, and made concessions to the workers' wage demands.

B. Fighting, touched off by university students with anti-Soviet slogans, allegedly broke out in Vilnius (capital of Soviet Lithuania) a few weeks ago. "Hundreds" were reportedly killed. A week later, anti-Russian demonstrations involving up to 30,000 people are reported to have taken place in the major Lithuanian

- C. The Khrushchev team may successfully have disarmed their critics by themselves adopting a tough line on Hungary and Middle East.
1. As example, Khrushchev's slashing attack on US, France and Israel--during Polish visit--was read from prepared document, rather than being spontaneous outburst.
- D. The loss of prestige suffered in Eastern Europe may have been offset by recent strategic gains accruing to the USSR in the Middle East.
- E. Khrushchev remains extremely active and continues to speak authoritatively for the regime.
- F. Thus, process of gradual erosion of Khrushchev's power base may have set in, but we must await outcome of Central Committee meeting (scheduled before end Dec.) for any firm indications of the erosion's extent.